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Acheson Hints Own Brainwash

Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, reflecting on his own experiences with Pentagon briefings on the Vietnam war, said last night that "maybe there was something to" the remark of former Michigan Gov. George Romney that he was "brainwashed" about U.S. war policies.

The criticism that Romney's frank remark drew early in his presidential campaign last year was a big factor in his abrupt withdrawal before the New Hampshire primary.

But now Acheson, who had been considered one of the more hawkish advisers among the inner circle of former President Johnson, says that he, too, had been "misled by optimistic views from the Pentagon" in 1965.

Acheson expressed the opinion during a CBS interview program with commentator Eric Sevareid. Much of the interview dealt with Acheson's role as an "elder statesman" adviser to Mr. Johnson last year.

In a forthcoming book, Townsend Hoopes, a former Pentagon official, states that Acheson had shocked Mr. Johnson by telling him he was being "led down a garden path" by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

On the interview program last night, Acheson said that when the President asked him to assess the Vietnam policy last year he insisted on talking "to people who were lower down the line than the Joint Chiefs, who had more immediate contact with both the military and the civil front in Vietnam."

"In going through the reports," Acheson said, "it seemed to me that the situation was quite different from the way it appeared when all these reports got sifted and came out through the ambassador, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the head of the CIA."

Acheson said he told the President the situation was like a football game—"like expecting the Redskins to win the championship without defensive ends."

"We could score anytime we wanted to," Acheson said. "There wasn't any trouble about our scoring. But at the very time we would be scoring, the enemy would be going around our ends and raising havoc with the population and the government that we were trying to protect."